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Where a master chef holds court

By NICHOLAS WYMAN

AS YOU walk into Belgrave Square in the heart of London, it is impossible not to be attracted to the enchanting, little converted-and-renovated church with a belfry atop. Painted off-white with splendid stained-glass windows, and pretty, elevated flower-boxes spilling over with yellow blooms on to the black canopies below, it exudes charm.

The clue that you have arrived at the right place is a red M with its dash of yellow emblazoned on the canopy. Two steps took us beyond the railing and through the door into the famous Mosimann's Club Restaurant. There was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and a cleverly orchestrated continuing theme of red, black and yellow, the hallmark of the famous chef, Anton Mosimann.

Mosimann is a household name in Britain as an author of culinary books, but mainly because of his very successful series of cooking programs on the BBC. Internationally, he is recognised for his contribution to *cuisine naturelle*. The Mosimann style of cooking has always been to use the most perfect, fresh ingredients and to prepare them in the best way — simply — so as to bring out their flavor, color and natural goodness, using low quantities of alcohol, salt and fats.

I first met Mosimann at the Ecole Hoteliere in Switzerland, when he gave a series of lectures and demonstrations to chefs and hotel managers. We students had gathered from 22 countries, and the culinary adventure eventually took some of us to London, where we took up the invitation to visit Anton Mosimann at his club. Like all clubs, he explained, you must become a member. The cost? — a $A500 joining fee and a mere $1000 annually upon acceptance of the lengthy application.

For me, this was certainly a new concept in dining. Many of the current 1500 members live outside Britain but, occasionally, there are exceptions to dining without membership, such as when the Princess of Wales entertains there.

We were taken on a grand tour, first to the main dining room, which was both elegant and cosy. It is overlooked by a glass-fronted winebar and cellar stocked with unusual and special wines for members to select and taste.

We followed downstairs to the basement kitchen where many members choose to dine at the Chef's Table, to watch the goings on. The kitchen, hung with oils and attractive brass and copper pots, is ultra-modern. The head chef "conducts the show" and can, by the flick of a central switch, turn off any oven or stove he chooses.

Upstairs are several small private rooms, including one in the actual belfry, each having its own corporate sponsorship and subtly decorated with the sponsor's trademark. The Wedgwood Room is pale blue and white, resembling the maker's classic plate. Among others there are Alfa Romeo, Gucci, and also Tiffany's.

My companion visited the boudoir, of which Mr Mosimann seemed inordinately proud, with justification, as it turned out. She was overwhelmed by a range of perfumes, lotions, potions and even sewing-and-mending requirements, but by now I was keen to get to the real business of our visit, the food.

We perused the lunch menu, which we were told, is changed regularly, but always presents several *cuisine naturelle* dishes, as well as a couple of Mosimann favorites. Passing by the grilled maize-fed *Poussin* with yoghurt and cucumber, and before arriving at the breast of pheasant and crab cakes with endive and watercress sauce, was my first surprise, bangers and mash (exactly that on the menu).

Bread and butter pudding was another luncheon favorite on the beautifully presented dessert menu, alongside the *gratin de peches maison*.

The list of 16 teas and infusions was very impressive, ranging from Assam golden-flowery orangepekoe, to apple tea made from freshly cooked Kentish apples with a little honey. Mosimann told us that his aim was to leave diners feeling inspired when they had finished reading the menu.

It would have been easy to while away several more hours browsing through the private library of 4000 wonderful cookbooks housed in the club, sipping Brazilian coffee and nibbling on the array of home-made chocolates cleverly embossed with the Mosimann logo, but eventually we mere mortals had to take that step back into the real world.

Famous chef Anton Mosimann (left) with apprentice Nicholas Wyman.

Anton Mosimann's bread-and-butter pudding

Dating from the early 18th Century, this is an English nursery dish transformed. It has also become one of Anton Mosimann's best-known recipes! It's an ideal pudding to serve for Sunday lunch — but I also serve it at dinner parties, and it's always rather well received.

Serves 10

500 ml milk
500 ml double cream
a little salt
1 vanilla pod, split
40 g butter, melted
6 large eggs
250 g vanilla sugar
6 small soft bread rolls
25 g sultanas, soaked in water and drained
100 g apricot glaze, warm
a little icing sugar

Combine the milk, double cream, salt and vanilla pod in a pan and bring to the boil.

Use a little of the melted butter to grease a large oval pie dish.

Mix the eggs and vanilla sugar (castor sugar flavored with a vanilla bean) together until pale, then gradually add the warm milk and cream mixture, stirring.

Cut the bread rolls into thin slices and butter them. Arrange in the base of the dish.

Add the sultanas along with the milk mixture, passing the latter through a sieve. The bread will float to the top. Place the dish in a bain-marie on top of folded newspaper, and pour in hot water to come halfway up the sides of the dish.

Poach carefully in a preheated oven (160 degrees) for 45-50 minutes. When the pudding is ready, it should wobble very slightly in the middle. Remove from the oven and cool a little.

Brush a thin coating of apricot glaze (melted apricot conserve) over the top of the pudding. Just before serving, dust with icing sugar. Serve warm.